

While on the subject of the nomenclature of natural history, there is an evil which is growing so rapidly as to deserve notice.

That is, the custom when genera are sub-divided, or species transposed from one genus to another, to credit the old species to the naturalist who constitutes the new, or even modifies the name of an old genus; thus depriving the original describer of his species, because it is associated with another series of species, or because the termination of its latin name be altered to suit the altered gender of the genus. In this way Linneus has been robbed of a large portion of his labours; not by Lamarck, for he appears to have been superior to such littleness; but by later naturalists, who have credited the old species of Linnæus, to Lamarck as an authority and precedent for their own innovations and appropriations. When fairly viewed, it can hardly fail to strike every disinterested mind, that the credit of the original description of a species should remain with the describer; he described the characters of a group, a species, and whether that species belongs to one or another genus, his description of its character must remain: indeed there is no show of any attempt to change such description; and if in the progress of science, new divisions of genera, or translations of species from one genus to another be found necessary; then credit the generic change to the constituter of the genus, and the species to its original describer, thus *Planorbis Corneus*. Lin. Lam. This, besides being strictly just to all parties, would have the effect of preventing useless and absurd modifications, by removing one of the chief incentives—the having the name of the innovator tacked to specific names.

MEETING FOR BUSINESS, SEPTEMBER 28, 1841.

DR. GODDARD, in the Chair.

The corresponding Secretary's report was read and adopted.

The committee on Mr. Haldeman's paper, "Description of

two new Freshwater Shells," reported in favour of publication.

The committee on Dr. Ravenel's "Description of two new fossil species of Scutellæ," reported in favour of publication.

The committee on Mr. Speakman's memoir on Light and Heat, reported in favour of depositing it in the library of the Academy.

The committee on Mr. Phillips's communication, read at the last meeting, on the claim to priority in the description of new species, submitted a report, which was ordered to be printed with the proceedings of this meeting.

The committee to whom was referred the consideration of the views and suggestions of Mr. Phillips concerning the rights of authors; and of the practice of changing original names to suit new made nomenclatures, having carefully examined these interesting and important matters, respectfully recommend the publication of Mr. Phillips's communication in the bulletin of the proceedings of the Academy; and further, beg leave to submit to the Academy a few brief remarks:—

In the opinion of your committee, the establishment of well-defined, and readily understood principles, as bases of nomenclatures, especially as regards the priority of the rights of authors in the history of nature, is most essential; not only because it will have a direct tendency to stimulate labourers in science to profound investigation and research, and secure to them the harvest they may achieve, and thence facilitate the acquisition of precise knowledge to all; but it will likewise be eminently conservative of the integrity and reputation of science itself amongst us.

It appears to your committee to have been conclusively understood by many naturalists, from precedents established in scientific institutions both in Europe and in this country—by usage, if not by written law; that the date of a printed publication, accessible to all, to men of science as well as to others, announcing new discoveries, shall fix and determine the right of priority; and hence names and

descriptions thus put forth, are entitled to and should receive the sanction, and be adopted, throughout the scientific world.

In contradistinction to this, your committee are aware that there exists an opinion, that an author might claim precedence, from the time his discoveries were read before a scientific society, and without reference at all to the time of printing or general circulation. But this seems to your committee, a very uncertain and vague expedient, the source of perpetual embarrassment and confusion; and much of the retardation of the spread of knowledge may be attributed to this cause. Many societies issue their transactions through the press at long intervals, months, even years, elapse before their discoveries reach the public: thus, it seems to your committee, manifestly unjust, that other collaborators should await such tardy enunciations of scientific knowledge, and so hazard the loss of their labour, and that too, by acts, even farther removed from their control, than are the periods, or the means of publication of the transactions of such societies, from the influence of their own members.

Your committee deem it inexpedient at this time to extend their observations; enough, in their opinion, having been adduced to warrant their conclusion--that the most obvious and rational criterion by which to test the merits of conflicting claims to originality, is solely, the printed and published testimony.

In relation to that portion of Mr. Phillips's communication, which alludes to the modifications and changes in the designation of genera and species made in new nomenclatures, without assigning credit, where it is justly merited,—thus wresting from the naturalist the honour acquired by his oftentimes onerous and unrequited toil,—your committee trust, that the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, will sustain them in an expression of decided disapprobation of a practice, so fraught with evil, doing injury alike to science, and to its collaborators.

EDWARD HALLOWELL,

B. H. COATES,

C. A. POULSON.